

### CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings.

#### *Listing of Claims:*

1 to 12 (Canceled).

13. (Original). A method comprising:

sending data frames from a first network element data processing unit over a data connection before receiving acknowledgements over the data connection from a second network element data processing unit, wherein a counter represents a number of data frames that may be sent before receiving the acknowledgements, and wherein the counter equal to zero indicates that no frames may be sent before acknowledgements are received;

decrementing the counter when data frames are sent from the first network element data processing unit;

incrementing the counter when acknowledgements are received from the second network element data processing unit;

determining whether the counter is equal to zero;

disabling an interface between the first and second network element data processing units, the disabling causing no data loss within the first and second network element data processing units;

receiving acknowledgements in the first network element data processing unit, after the disabling; and

enabling the interface when the counter equals a predetermined number.

14. (Original). The method of claim 13 comprising:

determining whether a number of acknowledgements has been received; and

sending an error signal, upon determining that the number of acknowledgements has not been received.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the disabling prohibits the first network element data processing unit from sending data frames over the data connection, and wherein the disabling allows the second network element data processing unit to receive acknowledgements over the data connection.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15, wherein the data connection is sent a disable signal ~~is generated~~ periodically.

17. (Currently Amended ) The method of claim 15, wherein the data connection ~~disable signal~~ is sent a disable signal by a user through a user interface.

18. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:

a first network element data processing unit, the first network element data processing unit to send acknowledgements and to receive data frames;

a second network element data processing unit, the second network element data processing unit to send data frames and to receive acknowledgments;

a counter to represent a number of data frames that may be sent before receiving the acknowledgements, wherein the counter equal to zero indicates that no frames may be sent before acknowledgements are received and wherein

the counter is decremented when data frames are sent from the first network element data processing unit and further wherein

the counter is incremented when acknowledgements are received from the second network element data processing unit;

and

a data connection coupled to the first and second network data processing units, the data connection to be disabled when the counter is determined to be equal to zero such that the first network element data processing unit can send acknowledgements, but the second network element data processing unit cannot send data frames

19 (Original). The apparatus of claim 18,

the second network element data processing unit to determine whether a number of acknowledgements has been received, and to send a warning signal, upon determining the number of messages has not been received.

20 (Original). The apparatus of claim 19,

the data connection to be disabled periodically.

21 (Original). The apparatus of claim 20,

the data connection to be disabled by a user through a user interface.

22. (Original). The apparatus of claim 21,

wherein the frames include data packets formatted according a number of protocols.

23. (Original). The apparatus of claim 22,

wherein the number of protocols include Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM), Internet Protocol (IP), Frame Relay, voice over IP (voIP), Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP), Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS), and Ethernet.

24-35. (Canceled).

36 (Original). A machine-readable medium that provides instructions, which when executed by a machine, cause said machine to perform operations comprising:

sending data frames from a first network element data processing unit over a data connection before receiving acknowledgements over the data connection from a second network element data processing unit, wherein a counter represents a number of data frames that may be sent before receiving the acknowledgements, and wherein the counter equal to zero indicates that no frames may be sent before acknowledgements are received;

decrementing the counter when data are sent from the first network element data processing unit;

incrementing the counter when acknowledgements are received from the second network element data processing unit;

determining whether the counter is equal to zero;

disabling an interface between the first and second element data processing units, the disabling causing no data loss within the first and second network element data processing units;

receiving acknowledgements in the first network element data processing unit, after the disabling; and

enabling the interface when the counter equals a predetermined number.

37 (Original). The machine-readable medium of claim 36 comprising:

determining whether the number of acknowledgements has been received; and

sending an error signal, upon determining that the number of acknowledgements has not been received.

38 (Original). The machine-readable medium of claim 37, wherein the disabling prohibits the first network element data processing unit from sending data frames over the data connection, and wherein the disabling allows the second network element data processing unit to receive acknowledgements over the data connection.

39 (Currently Amended). The machine-readable medium of claim 38, wherein the data connection is sent a disable signal ~~is~~ generated periodically.

40 (Currently Amended). The machine-readable medium of claim 39, wherein the data connection ~~disable signal~~ is sent a disable signal by a user activating an option of a graphical user interface.